

PROSPECT,

OR

View of the Moral World,

BY ELIHU PALMER.

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Comments on the sacred writings of the Jews and Christians: Genesis.

WE have already passed over the eleven first chapters of this book, in which there appeared much matter of various kinds, which called loudly for remark and reprobation. The next six chapters assume in some measure a different character, and seem to be less deserving of theological comment and criticism: The fighting of five kings against four—the number of sheep and cattle which Abraham and Lot possessed, their travels and the pitching of their tents, together with an hundred other historic circumstances of inferior and trifling consequence, are all matters in no shape whatever interesting to the people of the present age; but any man who can call such a bundle of historic anecdotes, whether they are true or false, a revelation from God, must possess a very confused intellect, and be totally ignorant of the true meaning of words. As to the familiar conversation which is said to have taken place between God and Abraham, and which is related in the seventeenth chapter, every body knows, who has any acquaintance with the principles of pure theism, that such a thing is inconsistent with the nature of the divine character, and that God never appears in any other way but in the splendor and energy displayed every where throughout the vast system of the universe. In this chapter God is said to have made a special covenant with Abraham; the fact is, however, that God is not partial, and of course he no more made a covenant with Abraham than with any other rational being upon earth. He has covenanted with all mankind upon earth, that if they will improve their faculties, practice justice and

exercise a spirit of benevolence to all, the fruits of such conduct should be happiness to all, and universal peace throughout the world. Kings and tyrants upon earth have always had their favorites, and revelationists have represented in the character of their God, nothing better than an imitation of these terrestrial partialities, and a close adherence to that system of favoritism which has marked the character of all earthly potentates.

In the first part of the eighteenth chapter, there is an account of Abraham's hospitality to three travelling gentlemen, whom the heading of the chapter denominates angels. They make some affectionate enquiries about Sarah, Abraham's wife; comfortable assurances are given to her, that she should hereafter become the mother of a fine son, and this sets the good old lady a laughing——fine fun indeed, and a very pretty bundle of stories it is to be called the word of God! All these matters may be passed over as uninteresting, and we shall come next to the sulphurious Sodom and Gomorrah. And the Lord said, because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know. Here is another awful departure from the principles of pure theism, and from that respect which man owes to his creator. God is here represented again as being ignorant—he had heard a great many flying reports concerning Sodom and Gomorrah, the truth of which he could not well vouch for; he could not certainly tell whether things were altogether so bad as they had been represented, and therefore, said he, I will go down and make the inquiry myself, and then I shall know.—Weak imperfect man would have been under the necessity of pursuing such a plan, in order to reduce doubt to certainty; but to represent the omniscient creator as subject to similar imperfections and necessities, is to strip him of the brilliant attributes of divinity, and reduce him to the standard of a man. God never made such a revelation of himself as this, and it is ignorance or prophanity which ascribes it to him! The remaining part of this chapter is taken up with a very familiar conversation which is said to have taken place between God and Abraham, concerning the destruction of Sodom. In this familiar interview, Abraham takes occasion to reduce the claims and stipulations of Jehovah as low as possible, and in the true spirit of bargaining, really accomplishes the object of ma-

king God promise that he would save the city, if ten righteous persons were found in it, whereas the first stipulation was fifty. After this degrading interview was over, God it is said in the last verse went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham : and Abraham returned unto his place. How feeble, how imperfect must have been their ideas concerning the almighty creator of the universe, when they could make such representations concerning his being and his conduct ! like two men standing in the street, holding a conversation concerning their own affairs, and when they had done, bid good bye, and each one went to his own house. Such might have been the God of the Jews, but he falls infinitely short of that splendid being, that dignified character, that eternal creator, whom believers in the religion of nature adore !

BOHEMIAN DEISTS.

REMARKS BY MR. WIELAND.

[Concluded.]

ALL these positions are natural and mostly immediate consequences from the incontrovertible axiom: "Opinion and belief, by the very nature of them, cannot be subject to any outward coercion." Their application to the Bohemian deists follows of itself. It is by no means credible that it was intended to deny these people that liberty of conscience (to which they have the same right) that belongs to all the professors of other religions. The writer of the foregoing letter produces indeed several reasons why these deists were transported to Transylvania, namely: 1. Because their sect was thought prejudicial to morality ; and, 2, to the tranquility of the country ; and, 3, especially so to the other multitudes that were lukewarm or ignorant in the christian religion : and because, 4, they were addicted to proselyting, and are said to have sought to augment their party, by persecution in their families, and by seduction among the neighbouring congregations : but, as the second and fourth points run together into one ; (for, as to the first, it is not to be thought of in the case now before us* ;)

and as the third is only something very lame and indeterminate: so that only the fourth point remains, which (the truth of the fact being supposed) affords a sufficient reason why a translocation of these people was found necessary. Proselyting, persecution and seduction, are indeed actions cognizable by the office of overseer of religion, and to which it cannot be indifferent. They are no more to be tolerated in deists than in catholics and protestants. The presumption of the most perfect justice and equity is always in favour of the actions of the emperor, who would not have proceeded against these people in a manner that was in such perfect contrast with his laudable maxims of toleration, unless he had the justest reasons for it. However, such a number as fifty-two families of Bohemian countrymen, who publicly and before their magistrate make profession of deism, is so extraordinary and singular a phenomenon in the moral world, that nothing is more natural and reasonable than the wish to be exactly and consistently informed of all the circumstances of the transaction with these Bohemian deists. How came such rude people as the Bohemian boors are usually represented to be, and how came precisely these 52 families at Rockitno and Chwoynetch, in the Kru-dimer circle, to embrace so simple and philosophical a religion? The reasons assigned by the excellent bishop of Koeniggrätz, may be indeed but too well founded: but it seems as if there must have been nearer and more determinate causes for producing so extraordinary an effect.—These fifty-two deistical boor-families declared themselves, it is said, directly against the general belief of Christians; and therefore, it is presumable, did not partake, or at least would not in future partake in the public worship of Christians. But would they set up no social religious exercises in its stead? or in what might these have consisted?—Farther: What interpretation are we to put upon the persecution of their families, of which they are accused? How could people who themselves could hope to be tolerated no otherwise than by virtue of the law of nature, which exempts the human intellect from all constraint, how came they to fall on the senseless thought of forcing their families to embrace their deism? It must be confessed, that the accusation, though it contains nothing impossible, yet is very little probable. No less were it to be wished that the world were more accurately informed, wherein the seduction consisted which they are charged with having used towards other neighbouring congregations. Nothing is more natural and allowable than that one who believes his own to be

the best way of walking, should shew it (as occasion offers) to another, who, according to his opinion, walks wrong. This is no more seduction, than it would be seduction if I, for example, should unreservedly impart to a catholic who should afford me an opportunity thereto, the causes wherefore, according to my conviction, I cannot be a catholic ; even supposing this should lead to discussion, that might make my catholic waver in his faith. To converse with one another on religious opinions, to give reasons to each other, to examine and endeavour to refute the counter-reasons of the other, and the like, is no seduction. But there are men in office and parish priests in the world who do not so nicely mince matters. I am very far from intending to say, that the priest and seneschal mentioned in the foregoing letter were actually in this predicament. But as there is always a possibility of it, it were well if the public were put in a condition of doing justice to these gentlemen. Also the manner and way in which the abovementioned deists were treated by the magistracy, after they had declared themselves as such, and laid claim to the general right of toleration that belongs to all men in religious matters ? How their transposition to Transylvania was managed ? How much or how little mildness or severity was shewn to them on that occasion ? And what may have been the true cause why *nothing farther has been heard of these people* ?—All these are questions, the circumstantial, impartial and authenticated answers to which are so much the more earnestly to be desired, as the whole of this transaction seems deserving, above a thousand others, of being preserved in the annals of mankind.

THE above remarks of Mr. Wieland are in general correct ; but some of them are exposed to objections of a serious nature. Whenever the fanatic is permitted to plead the authority of heaven for any vicious actions which he may take it into his head to commit, the wholesome laws of the state are set at defiance, there is an end of moral virtue, and the tranquility of society is sure to be destroyed. As to making proselytes to any religion, if this be done by the efforts of reason, by persuasion and argument, without persecution, there can be no well founded objection to such an attempt. Mr. Wieland insinuates towards the close of

his remarks, that the extraordinary nature of this case of the Bohemian deists, is ground of suspicion relative to the truth of the facts which are stated. This remark may have some weight in it, and each reader will pass his judgment upon this affair according to his own views and apprehensions of the subject; but if it be extraordinary that some portion of the human race should throw off the shackles of superstition, it is still more extraordinary that almost the whole of the civilized world should permit itself to be subjected to the mandates and doctrines of kings and priests, drawn from the old and new testament, under pretence of its being of divine origin.

OF THE TOWER OF BABEL.

THE story of the tower of Babel is told in the eleventh chapter of Genesis. It begins thus.—“ And the whole earth (it “ was but a very little part of it they knew) was of one lan- “ guage and of one speech.—And it came to pass as they jour- “ neyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of “ Shinar and they dwelt there.—And they said one to another, “ Go to, let us make brick and burn them thoroughly, and “ they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.— “ And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower “ whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us “ a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the “ whole earth.—And the Lord came down to see the city “ and the tower which the children of men builded.—And “ the Lord said, behold the people is one, and they have “ all one language, and this they begin to do, and now “ nothing will be restrained from them which they have “ imagined to do.—Go to, let us go down and there con- “ found their language, that they may not understand one “ another’s speech.—So, (that is, by that means) the Lord “ scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all “ the earth, and they left off building the city.

This is the story, and a very foolish inconsistent story it is. In the first place, the familiar and irreverend manner in which the almighty is spoken of in this chapter, is offensive to a serious mind. As to the project of building a tower whose top should reach to heaven, there never could be a people so foolish as to have such a notion; but to represent the Almighty as jealous of the attempt, as the writer of the

story has done, is adding prophanation to folly.—“*Go to,*” say the builders, “let us build us a tower whose top shall “reach to heaven. *Go to,* says God, let us go down and “confound their language.” This quaintness is indecent, and the reason given for it is worse, for, “now nothing will “be restrained from them which they have imagined to do.” This is representing the almighty as jealous of their getting into heaven. The story is too ridiculous, even as a fable, to account for the diversity of languages in the world, for which it seems to have been intended.

As to the project of confounding their language for the purpose of making them separate, it is altogether inconsistent; because, instead of producing this effect, it would, by increasing their difficulties, render them more necessary to each other, and cause them to keep together. Where could they go to better themselves?

Another observation upon this story is, the inconsistency of it with respect to the opinion that the bible is the word of God given for the information of mankind; for nothing could so effectually prevent such a word being known by mankind as confounding their language. The people who after this spoke different languages, could no more understand such a word generally, than the builders of Babel could understand one another. It would have been necessary, therefore, had such word ever been given or intended to be given, that the whole earth should be, as they say it was at first, of one language and of one speech, and that it should never have been confounded.

The case however is, that the bible will not bear examination in any part of it, which it would do if it was the word of God. Those who most believe it are those who know least about it, and priests always take care to keep the inconsistent and contradictory parts out of sight.

T. P.

AT Chichester Cathedral, a family vault for the burial of the Dukes of Richmond, which was erected by the late Duke, and inscribed **DOMUS ULTIMA**, occasioned the following epigram:

Did he who thus inscrib'd this wall
Not read or not believe Saint Paul?
Who says there is, where e'er it stands
Another house, not made with hands;
Or shall we gather from these words
That house is not a house of Lords?

Description of a Detected Rascal.

HOWEVER the practice of well-studied hypocrisy may enable a man to look a falsehood to the world, yet events unprepared for, may, by their suddenness, often surprize him into conviction.—There is a language of nature impressed on the human countenance far more powerful than words.—His features all bore witness against a tongue that faltered in his own defence; he trembled; he changed colour; the blood which before was wont to animate his cheek, flew instantly to his heart, and his heart ashamed of it, dashed it back into his face; his confused justification but strengthened the proof, and he stood a pitiable example to how abject a situation a man may degrade himself, whose mind is contaminated by baseness and dishonour.

AFTER all his blustering and looking big, the heart of the worst man cannot be at ease when he forces a look of contempt towards the ill opinion of mankind. In spite of all his bravadoes, he is a hypocrite twelve hours out of the four and twenty, and hypocrisy, as it is well said, is the homage which vice pays to virtue, unwillingly I confess, but still she is forced to pay it.

Is my mind, the man who takes pains to justify oppressed innocence, to rouse the indignation of mankind against cruelty, and to relieve indigent merit, is in reality benevolent, however vain he may be of such actions; such a man is unquestionably a more useful member of society, than the humblest monk who has no other plan in life, than the working out his own salvation in a corner.

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